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Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Report of the Secretary-General

1. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations have continued to strengthen their cooperation since the 1996 signature of the cooperation agreement between the two organizations. The General Assembly has annually debated efforts by IPU and the United Nations to secure parliamentary input to the major undertakings of the United Nations.

2. The first-ever Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments, which was held at Headquarters from 30 August to 1 September 2000, concluded with the adoption of the Declaration entitled "The Parliamentary vision for international cooperation at the dawn of the third millennium", in which the Presiding Officers pledged their commitment to international cooperation with a strong United Nations at its core, and reaffirmed their belief that the United Nations should remain the cornerstone of effective global cooperation.

3. Subsequently, the Heads of State and Government, in the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 8 September (resolution 55/2) resolved "to strengthen further cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments, through their world organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in various fields, including peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights and democracy and gender issues".

4. IPU has consistently endeavoured to contribute actively to the major governmental commitments of the past decade, expressed through its world conferences, by seeking the views of Parliaments on progress, obstacles and further initiatives that could contribute to their success.

5. IPU is presently classified as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Category I). This classification dates back to 1947 and no longer corresponds to the status of the world organization of parliaments, a unique inter-State organization representing

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141 parliaments. The ability of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to give full meaning to the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Declaration adopted at the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments is limited by this status.

6. The Secretary-General, in his report to the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly (A/55/409), echoed the words of the Millennium Declaration and, having reviewed the latest developments in the cooperation between both organizations, expressed his hope that this relationship could soon be recognized through a new, strengthened and formalized relationship between IPU and the General Assembly.

7. The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/19 of 8 November 2000, welcomed the efforts by IPU to provide this parliamentary contribution and enhanced support to the United Nations and requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States and IPU to explore ways in which this new and strengthened relationship may be established between IPU, the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs and to report thereon to the Assembly by May 2001.

8. In April 2001, the IPU Council adopted a report on cooperation between IPU and the United Nations, which suggested that the relationship between IPU and the General Assembly should be such as to allow IPU, in practice, to bring a parliamentary dimension to the United Nations and to permit the United Nations to cooperate with parliaments through IPU.

9. Specifically, the Inter-Parliamentary Union is suggesting the following areas as those in which it can play a role in strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments:

(a) Channel to the United Nations the views of the people, in all their diversity, as expressed in parliamentary debates and discussions at IPU;

(b) Promote parliamentary awareness and action in support of international agreements reached at the United Nations and through United Nations programmes;

(c) Further international agreements by promoting activities by parliaments and their members to mobilize public opinion and forge national support for international action;

(d) Prepare analyses and reports on parliamentary activities relevant to the work of the United Nations, particularly in areas where IPU has a particular expertise;

(e) Provide support for parliaments with the aim of increasing their capacity to carry out, at the national level, their legislative and oversight functions with regard to matters that are subject to international cooperation at the United Nations.

10. In order to ensure the greatest added value to the strengthened cooperation between the two organizations, IPU suggests that it work with the Secretary-General and the States Members of the United Nations to identify elements for a programme of work for IPU in which it would promote parliamentary debate and action in specific areas jointly identified as priorities for receiving parliamentary attention and support. It also suggests that the United Nations be given the ability to propose items for consideration by IPU.

11. These measures would allow for a more systematic provision of a platform for the United Nations to interact directly with parliaments and their members. In practice this could be done at the different parliamentary meetings organized by

IPU, including by expanding on the annual parliamentary meeting organized in connection with the United Nations General Assembly and by systematically organizing parliamentary meetings in connection with special sessions of the General Assembly and other United Nations conferences and summits.

12. In addition to political support for the activities of the United Nations, it is also suggested that IPU provide greater operational support to the work of the United Nations departments, programmes and agencies. With respect to the promotion of peace and security, IPU may, through its technical assistance programme, be in a position to channel support from national parliaments to the building and strengthening of democratic structures and, in particular, to the parliaments themselves in certain areas of peace-building or peacekeeping operations. IPU has developed specific expertise on human rights, democracy and gender issues on which cooperation with the United Nations could be expanded, in particular through the provision of statistical data and technical assistance to States.

13. The Secretary-General is in agreement with the suggestions made by IPU as a means to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the work of the United Nations. He recognizes, as the General Assembly did in its resolution 55/19, the unique character of IPU as a world organization representing national parliaments. Consequently, and in view of the General Assembly's stated desire to establish a new, strengthened and formalized relationship between itself, its subsidiary organs and IPU, the Secretary-General, having consulted with Member States and IPU, wishes to make the following recommendations, as requested in resolution 55/19:

(a) As an exception to the criteria established by the General Assembly in its decision 49/426 of 9 December 1994, the Assembly may wish to grant IPU a standing invitation to participate, as appropriate, in the sessions and work of the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs and in the international conferences convened under the auspices of the United Nations;

(b) In addition, the General Assembly may wish to consider a decision concerning the circulation of the documents of IPU in the Assembly;

(c) The General Assembly may also wish to consider inviting the specialized agencies of the United Nations to adopt similar modalities for cooperation with IPU.

14. Should the General Assembly decide to accept any of the recommendations made by the Secretary-General, he would, immediately upon enactment of its decision, initiate a joint review by the United Nations and IPU of the cooperation agreement concluded between the two organizations in 1996.